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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000753

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DEPT FOR SE GRATION, S/USSES, AF A/S CARSON, AF/E
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: WFP BARGE CONVOY DESTROYED IN AMBUSH IN JONGLEI
STATE

Classified By: CDA Robert E. Whitehead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Jikany Nuer militia armed with weapons as heavy as RPGs ambushed a poorly conceived WFP barge convoy in the border area of eastern Jonglei-southern Upper Nile states the evening of June 13, as it ferried vital food aid to Southern Sudanese IDPs displaced by March and April ethnic clashes. Five barges remained missing as of June 15, and of the sixteen that were able to flee northwards to Nasir, only one escaped total looting. The SPLA's two escort boats, procured and deployed at the last minute at WFP insistence, were sunk during the fighting. UNMIS/Juba fears that the resulting wreckage may have made the Sobat river corridor between Nasir and Akobo unnavigable. If true, humanitarian-aid shipments to the region's 18,000 IDPs would be limited to helicopter airlift during the South's rainy season. Casualty figures remain incomplete: an estimated eighty barge workers and at least nineteen SPLA were wounded in the attacks. By the evening of June 14, ten of the soldiers had died, and thirty civilians were dead.

¶2. (C) UNMIS/Juba Civil Affairs Deputy Head Diane de Guzman (strictly protect) slammed &nave WFP preparations⁸ in her June 14 discussion with Acting Consul General Juba. According to de Guzman, despite six days of rising tension in eastern Jonglei between Luo Nuer and Jikany Nuer ethnic groups that required direct intervention by the Nasir County Commissioner, Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) Internal Affairs Minister Gier Aluong, and SPLA Chief of General Staff James Hoth Mai, WFP officials pressed forward with a food-aid shipment against the advice of UNMIS civil affairs and peacekeeping forces stationed in the fledgling team site of Akobo on late June 13. &They simply did not do their homework) this entire situation could have been avoided had they been more receptive to advice further down river,⁸ she said. UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande told Acting CG June 14 that she reluctantly approved the shipment, believing field-level WFP representatives, claims that they had successfully persuaded the SPLA to sweep the river in advance of the convoy. In fact, the twenty-six barge convoy departed Nasir concurrently with a security escort consisting of two dilapidated speed boats manned by less than twenty SPLA. Compounding the situation, the SPLA soldiers hailed from the Luo Nuer community in Dolab Hill. UNMIS/Juba Civil Affairs believes this sparked further localized tensions amongst the Jikany Nuer.

¶3. (C) However, UNMIS/Akobo peacekeepers and newly-appointed SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Mamur maintain the attackers were not limited merely to disaffected Jikany Nuer suspicious of a cross-clan food shipment. In separate discussions with A/CG on June 14, both Mamur and Akobo team-site peacekeepers insisted that the Jikany Nuer fighters

were heavily armed, and had the further advantage of the low-level of the Sobat River. This allowed attackers to shoot down into the barges; an Indian peacekeeper described reports that had been passed to him as akin to an aerial assault.⁸ UNMIS Sector Three commander told A/CG June 14 that UNMIS believes that former Khartoum-allied militias from the region were active components of the firefight, and the possibility of external manipulation of the situation was high.⁸

14. (C) Despite purportedly vociferous protests that he cannot control his downriver clan,⁸ UNMIS officials transported the Nasir County Commissioner to the conflict zone for a second time on June 14. The Commissioner was last in the area June 8, and had told both Jonglei Governor Kuol Manieng and SPLA Chief of General Staff James Hoth Mai that the situation was calm enough⁸ for food convoys to move forward. UNMIS had deployed the commissioner to quell then-rampant rumors that the barge convoy, which carried 7,000 metric tons of food, also carried weapons shipments from Khartoum. (Note: The Jikany and Luo Nuer had clashed violently several months ago. Reportedly, the Jikany feared that the convoy might be carrying weapons as well as food to the Luo IDPs in Akobo, with which they would counterattack. End note.) These allegations spread as the week progressed, forcing the Internal Affairs Minister to order the barges to halt on June 10 so that three private boats traveling within the WFP convoy could have their cargo areas searched. When the searches yielded nothing, the Southern Sudan Police Service sought extraordinary authority from Juba to search the WFP barges, a request protested by UN HC Head Lise Grande. Hours later Grande had secured permission for WFP to

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proceed with the convoy) an action further delayed by the SPLA's inability to rent an escort boat. (NOTE: Neither the SPLA nor SSPS currently possess riverine equipment. They must rent services from local boat operators, many of whom are reluctant to risk the increased likelihood of damage to their property as a result of security operations. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) The SPLA D/COS for Operations told Acting CG that, in consultation with President Kiir, Chief of General Staff Hoth has authorized 100 additional SPLA to deploy to Akobo to prepare for an extraordinary disarmament of the civilian population along the Sobat River corridor. Mamur stated that the Internal Affairs Minister will travel to the affected region June 16 in order to assess the Southern Sudan Police Service's capacity to jointly conduct the operation. GOSS Vice President Riek Machar, also Nuer, may travel with him.

16. (SBU) Comment: Ethnic clashes, usually involving cattle rustling and reprisal attacks, have been growing in frequency and ferocity in Jonglei and Upper Nile states in recent months, with an estimated 1000 people dead. But this attack on a WFP assistance convoy appears to raise the level of violence and weaponry by at least a notch and it highlights the GoSS's inability to provide security for the local population. While we do not totally discount the possibility that Khartoum could be encouraging this unrest in an effort to destabilize and discredit the GoSS, we also note that tribal conflict and cattle raids in the region are a long-standing problem, and are liable to flare up without any need of outside incitement. The failure of the Southern authorities to protect them leaves the population free to take whatever self-defense measures they feel appropriate, leading to a continuing cycle of attacks and reprisals.

WHITEHEAD